

Ciudad Abierta



Welcome ceremony at Ciudad Abierta for first-year students of architecture and design, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, April 7, 2003, courtesy Archivo Histórico José Armstrong, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso

Works

Ciudad Abierta
(Founded 1971, Ritoque, Chile)

Amereida Phalène Latin South América (2017)

Archival and documentary materials

Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA)–Pireos Street (“Nikos Kessanlis” Exhibition Hall), Athens

Part commune, part pedagogical experiment, and part hands-on architectural laboratory, Ciudad Abierta (Open city) was founded by a roving troupe of artists and poets—tellingly enough, hardly any “professional” architects, at first—on a desolate, windswept stretch of grass and sand along the Pacific Ocean some thirty kilometers north of the Chilean port city of Valparaíso.

Two dates, two events stand out in the story of Ciudad Abierta’s genesis. Firstly, a journey, or *travesía*, across the South American landmass by a group of students and teachers under the leadership of Argentine poet Godofredo Iommi in 1965—the inverted map of the Southern Cone used to guide them along, echoing the famous drawing *América invertida* by Uruguayan avant-garde painter Joaquín Torres García from 1943—symbolized a broader call resonating across the Southern Hemisphere for a dramatic rethinking of established geopolitical orientations. Secondly, the publication, in 1967, of the collective’s founding poem *Amereida*, a neologism derived from combining the title of Virgil’s *Aeneid* with the “America.” This meridional *Odyssey* ends on the following elliptical, enigmatic note: “the path is not the path”—a premonition of the centrality accorded, in later years, to *improvisation* as the founding principle of living and building alike.

Indeed, present-day visitors to Ciudad Abierta will be struck by the provisional, ephemeral nature of much of the construction taking place there, or by the fleeting impression left by Ciudad Abierta’s passage for that matter; clearly any type of building activity on the South Pacific coast must submit itself to the force of the elements, but inevitably one is reminded of the long history of migration and nomadic living that has shaped this particular part of the world, so far away from the established power centers of cultural mainstreaming.

In recent years, rising interest in Ciudad Abierta’s modest, pastoral utopianism has tended primarily toward the collective’s historical achievement—the Ciudad Abierta legacy. The twofold nature of documenta 14 allows for a more even-handed treatment: the group’s exemplary history is told primarily in Athens using a wealth of archival material, presented in an exhibition design of their own making; the collective as a living organism, and as a platform for experimentation for future generations of architects, poets, and urbanists, is on full view in Kassel, powerfully demonstrating the recurring relevance of their improvisational, environmentally sound brand of building.

—Dieter Roelstraete